
HQ U.S. Army Installation Management Command, Europe Region



Public Affairs Office
Unit 29353, Box 200 APO AE 09014
69033 Heidelberg
DSN 370-7549/7235
Tel.: 06221-57-7549/7235

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE April 30, 2007

Heidelberg Soldiers taste test new MREs

By Juan R. Meléndez Jr.
USAG Heidelberg Public Affairs

HEIDELBERG, Germany – Soldiers here tested two new rations being fielded this year: an on-the-go compact ration based on pocket sandwiches, and a kind of kitchen-in-a-box that prepares hot meals for 18 people with just the pull of a tab.

Representatives of the Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center, Mass., visited the Heidelberg Garrison Dining Facility on April 27, presenting new rations and the latest improved versions of Meals, Ready to Eat.

“All of our rations are warfighter recommended, warfighter tested and warfighter approved,” said Department of Defense Combat Feeding program integrator Kathy-Lynn Evangelos.

The stars of the demonstration were the compact First Strike Ration and the Unitized Group Ration-Express, a portable, easy way to prepare a hot meal in the field without kitchen equipment.

The First Strike Ration is a small package meant to substitute for three MREs. It has fewer calories (about 3,000 versus the three MREs’ 3,900) but is more compact. Better yet, it needs no water for preparation other than that which is added to the beverage mix.

The meals themselves are in the form of pocket sandwiches, to be eaten by hand with a minimum of fuss. Evangelos calls it the “assault ration.”

“This is great for Soldiers on the go,” said Sgt. 1st Class Mark Danley, V Corps’ senior food service sergeant, who was at the dining facility to render a professional opinion.

“For scouts, space is always a problem,” said Danley, who once supported a reconnaissance unit in Hawaii. They have to be as self-contained as possible, he added, “because when they move out of the FOB (forward operating base) they don’t come back.” Typically, Soldiers get ready by field-stripping their MREs for minimum bulk by removing unwanted items.

Danley foresees crews loading up on the First Strike Rations and perhaps one of the group rations before they move out. A busy Soldier on the move, he said, can just reach into his FSR pack, pull out and eat the meal, and “no problem.”

And when things calm down enough to allow a more leisurely meal, the troops can pull out the Unitized Group Ration-Express, or as Evangelos calls it, the “kitchen in a carton.”

The UGR-E packs into a surprisingly compact carton. To heat the meal, a Soldier merely opens the box, then, without removing anything, pulls a tab which releases a salt water solution that reacts chemically to heat the four trays of food in about 35 minutes.

That releases a cloud of steam and some hydrogen gas. “Naturally,” Evangelos said, “you aren’t going to be doing this in an enclosed area.”

The box contains everything needed for 18 meals, including trays, a trash bag and serving utensils.

“I think some of these are going to end up back at the dining facility,” said Heidelberg Garrison food service officer Christopher B. Jenkins admiringly as he hefted one of the hard plastic serving spoons.

“This is great,” Jenkins said about the UGR-E concept. “No cooks, no kitchen equipment, and it taste good.”

“I hope this doesn’t mean we’re out of a job,” he added with a grin.

Jenkins knows from personal experience how hard it can be to get hot meals to Soldiers in the field. While at Fort Drum, N.Y., he supported the 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry, but when the troops went to the field, food would end up going to waste “because they were always moving.”

Also being presented at the Heidelberg demonstration were 13 new MRE items, which included items approved up to fiscal year 2009. Every year, three to five items in the 24-menu MRE range are changed.

“Variety is very important to the warfighter,” Evangelos said, adding that Soldiers get bored eating the same thing day in and day out, so it’s important to give them choices.

Danley gave a thumbs-up to the new MREs he’d tasted at the presentation, and looked to their being fielded.

Not just U.S. Soldiers tried the MREs. Czech Sgt. 1st Class Tomas Teterka, assigned to the NATO element on Patton Barracks, said he particularly liked “the one with beef.”

His countryman Sgt. Peter Polansky didn't join in the tasting, but he had eaten American MREs in field exercises. "They're certainly better than ours," he said.

Cutlines:

Steam cooking

Gerald Darsch, director of Department of Defense Combat Feeding, demonstrates the Unitized Group Ration-Express to Sgt. 1st Class Mark Danley, left, and Spec. Tina Avalos, both of V Corps, April 27, 2007. (Photo by Juan R. Meléndez, Jr.)

Box

Department of Defense Combat Feeding program integrator Kathy-Lynn Evangelos (right) shows off the contents of the Unitized Group Ration-Express to Heidelberg Garrison food service officer Christopher B. Jenkins and Sgt. 1st Class Mark Danley, V Corps' senior food service sergeant, April 27, 2007. (Photo by Juan R. Meléndez, Jr.)

FSR-closeup

Representatives of the Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center, Mass., visited the Heidelberg Garrison Dining Facility to present new rations April 27, 2007. This is a closeup of the First Strike Ration packet. (Photo by Juan R. Meléndez, Jr.)

-30-

The U.S. Army Installation Management Command, Europe Region (IMCOM-Europe) is one of six regional offices created Oct. 24, 2006, (formerly known as Installation Management Agency) as part of an Army-wide initiative to focus management of Army installations around the world under one organization. IMCOM-Europe is responsible for all facets of support for U.S. Army Soldiers and families in Europe from drivers' licenses to child care to force protection. As the landlord for all U.S. Army facilities in Europe, IMCOM-Europe is responsible for infrastructure and continuing the Army's strong commitment to environmental protection. Its higher headquarters is located in Arlington, Va.